



NEWS

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The United States and the Caribbean: Seizing the Opportunities Ahead

By Roberta S. Jacobson, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs

In 2011, St. Kitts and Nevis faced spiraling crime and one of the world's highest per capita homicide rates. Working with U.S. government-sponsored legal advisors, the Kittitian government, police, and prosecutors put in place new policies and practices that led to a double-digit drop in the rate of violent crime, making communities safer. This is one example of the strong U.S. commitment to working hand in hand with the nations of the Caribbean to address shared challenges. I am in Barbados today to focus on our cooperation and to meet with all the U.S. ambassadors who serve in the Caribbean. The United States and the Caribbean enjoy extensive political, economic, cultural, and family ties. We share a commitment to human rights and democratic values, reflected in the free and fair elections in the United States and across the Caribbean. We share as well a commitment to fighting corruption and diversifying our economies to share more widely the benefits of economic growth.

High-level engagement is essential to our partnership. At each of the past two Summits of the Americas, President Obama met with Caribbean leaders to discuss how to strengthen the vital U.S.-Caribbean friendship. Secretary Clinton has made 10 trips to five Caribbean countries, and other Cabinet-level officials including Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano and Attorney General Eric Holder visited the region. U.S. officials from across the government work closely with Caribbean counterparts every day to advance our shared agenda.

The hallmark of our engagement is the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI), through which we have committed \$203 million toward improving citizen security, reducing violence, and combating illicit trafficking. CBSI is creating lasting partnerships through a focused, whole-of-government approach, with shared responsibility. We are seeing results: for instance, illicit drug seizures are at record levels, and homicide rates in several countries are down substantially.

Our engagement also has a strong economic dimension. Trade and investment remain robust, with Caribbean companies benefiting from U.S. trade preferences to bring jobs and development to the region. With the Inter-American Development Bank and the private sector, we are selecting finalists for the Caribbean Idea Marketplace, enabling Diaspora and host country entrepreneurs to launch new ventures. We are increasing women's economic

participation through initiatives like the Women's Entrepreneurship Network. We are committed to improving educational opportunities through USAID programs as well as 100,000 Strong in the Americas, President Obama's goal to boost educational exchanges between the United States and Latin America and the Caribbean to 100,000 in each direction. We are especially focused on increasing education and work opportunities for youth. Under CBSI, we established initiatives throughout the region to help at-risk youth, the most recent a \$20 million, five-year program that benefits 100,000 young people in the Dominican Republic.

On energy and the environment, we are improving technical capacity and laying the groundwork for investment under the Energy and Climate Partnership of the Americas (ECPA) and the Connect 2022 initiative. ECPA has enabled Suriname to use sustainable power generation and to protect its vast ecological wealth. We are strengthening health systems in 14 countries through the President's Emergency Plan for HIV/AIDS Relief. In Guyana, where we have invested \$175 million over the past 10 years, the HIV prevalence rate has dropped by more than half.

These examples illustrate our collaboration with leaders and citizens of the Caribbean in shaping communities, improving livelihoods, and integrating our nations. The United States will continue to partner with the governments, private sector, and civil society of the region to achieve even greater success.

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